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would not be tolerated in English; and we see no reason, why the Welsh language, which presents almost equal facilities for the composition of blank verse, should be thus enfeebled. Our chief motive for noticing this deformity has been the hope, that the translator will avoid it, as much as possible, in the ensuing part of his work. For the rest, we have no difficulty in repeating, what we observed last month, that the performance is, in most essential respects, highly creditable to the talent, as it is to the patriotism, of Mr. Harris, and cannot fail to prove a respectable accession to our national literature.

BARDIC CONGRESSES.

THE revival, during the last three years, of the ancient custom of holding Bardic Congresses cannot but communicate an interest to any inquiry into the history of this national practice. To ascend to the *summa vestigia rerum*, however, by investigating the origin of the Bardic Institution itself, is beyond the present purpose, even if the subject had not before undergone a partial examination in this work *. The following inquiry will therefore be confined to such a summary view of the Congresses of past times, as we may be able to draw from our historical records, without pretending to exhaust a subject, the full investigation of which must be left to more laborious researches.

Bardic assemblies appear to have been anciently of two sorts, the GORSEDD and the CADAIR †: there have indeed since been other names in use; but these were the two main distinctions, the first having reference to a general or supreme Congress and the last to one merely particular or provincial. In process of time, however, these original distinctions seem to have faded away, or to have been applied indiscriminately to the two modes of meeting: for this reason, we shall avoid making use of the Welsh terms, and shall speak of the assemblies of both sorts, under one general English denomination.

* Vol. i. p. 445.

† *Gorsedd* and *Cadair* imply, alike, a Chair or Seat of Presidency, and differ only in their degrees.

That the Bardic Congress, in its primitive character, was of high antiquity may be sufficiently proved by the authority of Cæsar, who speaks of the annual assemblies of the Druids of Gaul at an appointed central situation in the territory of the Carnutes*: and, as, upon another occasion, he ascribes the origin of the Druidical institution to this island, his testimony must be considered of equal value with reference to the Druids or Bards of Britain. And, indeed, were it not so, the stupendous Druidical remains, still to be seen on Salisbury Plain, seem to mark that spot as the scene of these Bardic assemblies at a period far beyond the reach of our historical records. In those Triads too, which profess to preserve the Institutes of Dyrnwal Moelmud, who is supposed to have lived some ages before the Christian era, express mention is made of the Bardic Congress, which is styled one of the three privileged assemblies and one of the three assemblies of fraternal union†. Of the antiquity, then, of this practice there can be no rational doubt; and it seems equally evident, that it formed originally an integral part of the civil policy of the country. Yet, upon the destruction of the religious ascendancy of the Druids, the Bardic Congress must have lost its political consequence, though it seems long afterwards to have retained its institutional character, as the medium of preserving the traditions, laws, and doctrines of Bardism. Political feuds, however, and dissensions among the bards themselves, seem occasionally to have interrupted the practice of holding the Congresses, as well as, in time, to have made material innovations on their genuine character. What was originally appropriated to the preservation of the ancient memorials and institutes of the Bardic system became gradually subservient to the promotion of minstrelsy and song. And, even in this point of view, the Bardic Congresses appear, for a long period succeeding the conquest of Wales, to have been wholly discontinued, owing, in all probability, to the jealous policy of the English, who, conscious of the influence of the ancient Bards, dreaded the possibility of its revival in their descendants. However, the primitive custom, in shadow at least, if not in substance, was, in time, recovered by the Cymry, and has continued, at intervals, to be enjoyed, with more or less spirit, until the period of its late auspicious revival.

* Bell. Gall. lib. vi. c. 13, 14.

† Arch. of Wales, vol. iii. p. 283.

Such is the faint and general outline of the history of the Bardic Congresses, and which, unfortunately, the surviving records of past ages do not allow us to fill up as satisfactorily as we could wish. A few notices are all we can now supply.

The first Congress, of which any memorial seems to have descended to us, was one held on the banks of the Conway, in the seventh century, under the auspices, as it would appear, of Maelgwn Gwynedd, Prince of North Wales. The account, which is both quaint and obscure, occurs in a poem of Iorwerth Beli, a poet of the fourteenth century, who seems to have recorded the event for the sake of a joke practiced on the occasion by Maelgwn, who proposed a reward for such of the bards and minstrels as should swim over the Conway. The offer was acceded to, and, upon the arrival of the parties on the opposite shore, the harpers were found incapable of playing, owing, it may be supposed, to the injury their instruments had sustained from the water, while the bards, as might be expected, continued in as good tune as ever; this being, probably, the result contemplated by Maelgwn. The following is a version of the passage, in which this singular event is related*.

When Maelgwn Hir† went from the territory of the Son of Don‡,
From the banquet of the Champion of the Congress§ to Caer Seion||,
And was taking with him memorials of the superior excellence
That vocal song had acquired over the minstrels,
And had proposed many substantial rewards
To all the company that should swim the river;
When they came to land, on the sea-boundary of the ebb-tide,
The harpers were not worth a half-penny,
God is witness of this, and other witnesses know it;
But, by reason of the fair increase of the faculty of the wise,
The poets composed equally well as before,
Notwithstanding their swimming. Such is the nature of generous
spirits!

A wide chasm now intervenes in the history of these assem-

* Id. vol. i. p. 476.

† So called, most probably, as being the son of Caswallon Law Hir.

‡ This was Gwdion, whose territory was *Gwynedd Uch Conwy*, or Gwynedd above the Conwy. See vol. ii. of the CAMBRO-BRITON, p. 328, for a Triad relating to Gwdion.

§ The original words are *Gwalch Gorsedd*, which imply, literally, the Hawk of the Gorsedd, but of which, in this instance, it is now impossible to discover the precise allusion. They had probably reference to some individual, who had signalled himself at one of these meetings.

|| Caernarvon, or the ancient Segontium.

blies, and which is perhaps to be explained, in a great measure, by the unsettled and turbulent events of the period, to which it relates. The muses, like the laws, are silent amidst the clang of arms, whether it be the din of foreign wars or of intestine commotions, to both of which Wales was miserably exposed during this troubled season. The next records which we find, and which are merely of a general nature, have reference to several Congresses held during the close of the eleventh century, under the respective auspices of Bleddyn ab Cynvyn and Gruffydd ab Cynan, princes of North Wales, both of them distinguished for their munificent patronage of the Bards. The Bardic laws and institutions appear to have undergone various modifications at these meetings, and particularly at the Congresses held under the last-mentioned prince, who is also, however, accused of having sanctioned the innovations alluded to in a former part of this article; in particular, he is supposed to have given the Congress a more musical character than it previously had, by the introduction from Ireland, where he had his birth, not only of several skilful musicians, but also of some musical instruments before unknown in Wales.

The example, set by Bleddyn ab Cynvan, in the encouragement of the Bards, was followed by his son Cadwgan, as appears by a passage in the *Brud y Tywysogion* (Chronicle of the Princes) in the *Archæology of Wales**, of which the following is a translation.—“In the year of Christ 1107 Cadwgan, the son of Bleddyn ab Cynvan, made an honourable feast, and invited to it the chieftains and gentlemen of the country, out of every province in Wales, to his castle at Aberteivi. And, for the sake of shewing the greater respect to the guests, he invited to it the bards and the best minstrels, vocal and instrumental, that could be found in all Wales; and he gave them chairs† and subjects of emulation, according to the custom of the feasts of King Arthur. He also gave them customs, and privileges, and honourable presents, and dismissed them, rewarded with gifts and privileged with honour, every one to return to the place he came from.”

It is probable, that from the impulse, given by Bleddyn ab

* Arch. of Wales, vol. ii. p. 537.

† A Chair was the usual prize, as it still continues, for the successful candidate on these occasions.

Cynvyn and Gruffydd ab Cynan, the Congresses of the Bards were for some time afterwards uninterruptedly held. However, the next instance, which occurs after that last noticed, is one at an interval of sixty years, at which Rhys ab Gruffydd, Prince of South Wales, presided, and which, like the last, the reader will perceive, united the festivities of the board with the charms of music and song. The following record of it is also extracted from the *Brud y Tywysogion**.—“In the year 1166 the Lord Rhys held a distinguished feast in the castle of Aberteivi; and he instituted two sorts of contention—one between the bards and poets, and the other between harpers, and crowdors, and pipers, and a variety of vocal singers. He bestowed two chairs on the victors in the contest, whom he also enriched with immense presents. A young page of his own court obtained the victory in instrumental song; and the men of Gwynedd obtained it in vocal song. All the other minstrels also received from the Lord Rhys as much as they demanded, so that no one was disappointed. And that feast was proclaimed a year before it took place over Wales, and England, and Scotland, and Ireland, and many other countries.”

For nearly three centuries after this we have not been able to discover any traces of the continuance of this national usage; but the conquest of Wales, at the close of thirteenth century, became necessarily, as already intimated, fatal to the influence of the bards, who were, no doubt, immediately deprived of the enjoyment of their ancient privileges. Their Congresses, therefore, we may presume, were, for a long period afterwards, entirely discontinued; and it is not until the fifteenth century, during the reign of Edward IV., that we find an instance of their revival, a royal commission having been then obtained for the holding of one at Carmarthen, under the patronage of a gentleman of that neighbourhood. At this meeting Davydd ab Edmund, a distinguished poet, of Hanmere, in Flintshire, obtained the chair, and gained, through his persuasive eloquence, the sanction of the Congress to the twenty-four new canons of poetry, which the loss of the original laws had induced him and other North Wales bards to compile, but against which the bards of Glamorgan, who pretended to be possessed of the primitive canons, afterwards entered a protest.

* Arch. of Wales, vol. ii. p. 437.

In the reign of Henry VII. another Congress, also under the royal authority, took place in South Wales; but no particulars of it, as we are aware, have descended to these times. To this succeeded several others during the sixteenth century in the same division of the Principality, under the auspices respectively of Sir Richard Neville, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, for the express purpose of collecting and consolidating what remained of the ancient Bardic institutes and traditions. And, on the 26th of May, 1568, a Congress, or *Eisteddfod*, as it was called *, was holden, under a commission granted by Queen Elizabeth, at Caerwys, in the county of Flint, which commission was directed to Sir Richard Bulkeley and others, and is now, we believe, in the possession of the family of Mostyn. It does not appear, however, that any thing was done at this meeting beyond a mere contest of musicians, attended by some empty parade of no connection with the genuine purposes of the Bardic Congress; and this, perhaps, was the last assembly of the sort held under the sanction of the royal license.

In 1580 a Congress was established in South Wales, under the presidency of Sir Edward Lewis of the Van, and at which the Bardic collections, made, some years before, under the auspices of Sir Richard Neville and Lord Pembroke, as already alluded to, were considerably augmented; and these were again thoroughly revised and methodized, and finally declared to comprise a full illustration of Bardism, at a Congress holden at Bewpyr Castle, Glamorganshire, under the patronage of Sir Richard Basset, in 1681, and at which thirteen regular bards attended, as appears by a list still in existence.

From the time of Sir Richard Basset, until the meeting at Carmarthen in 1819, the only efforts that appear to have been made to revive this national custom, were those of the London Society of *Gwyneddigion*, under whose auspices several *Eisteddfodau*, for the encouragement of Welsh poetry and music, have been holden in the various counties of North Wales. But we are not aware, that these laudable attempts were productive of any extraordinary *éclat*. To the *Gwyneddigion*,

† This appears to have been the first occasion on which the word *Eisteddfod*, or Session, was applied to the Bardic Congress, and without any advantage, that is at all perceptible, over the old terms.

however, must be ascribed the merit of having restored a practice, which had been suspended for more than a century, and to which, we may hope, a more propitious impulse has now been communicated by the new spirit, which has burst forth in the Principality. The proceedings of the Congresses, that have taken place during the last three years, have been fully reported in the CAMBRO-BRITON*, which leaves us only the task of expressing a hope, that the patriotism, by which they were animated, may long continue to foster the cause of our national literature in all its interesting varieties. In a word, ESTO PERPETUA.

THE MISCELLANIST.—No. XV.

I. WELSH CONCORDANCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CAMBRO-BRITON.

SIR,—I congratulate the admirers of Welsh literature on the resumption of your patriotic labours, and on the restoration of the CAMBRO-BRITON to life, after having sustained a political death of a few months. It is to be hoped, that no incident will in future suspend so interesting and valuable a publication, undertaken in a spirit of patriotism, and conducted with an ability, highly creditable to yourself, and useful and beneficial to the best interests of your country. From the continuation of this work I anticipate the most important results—I seem already to pierce through the mists, which have so long enveloped the early parts of our national history, and to hear the welkin of Wales once more ring with the tuneful *pennillion* of its mountain bards.

The two best judges of literary composition, whom ancient and modern times have produced, unanimously concur in opinion, that a faultless piece never has been, nor possibly can be. If then the productions of the most sublime geniuses are not exempt from the imperfections incidental to our common nature, can we wonder, that into the pages of a periodical publication, which, like the CAMBRO-BRITON, embraces so

* See vol. i. pp. 35 and 71.—vol. ii. pp. 90 and 130.—vol. iii. p. 55. and also a communication in the subsequent part of the present Number.